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AF/S FOR NUELING

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [Z1](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC READOUT OF MBEKI MEETING

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER DELL FOR REASONS 1.5(B)  
AND 1.5 (D)

[11](#). (C) Summary: DCM met September 21 with Gandhi Mudzingwa, Director of Presidential Affairs for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mudzingwa confirmed that the MDC had met over the weekend with President Mbeki, who had asked what, short of pressure, he could do to help manage Zimbabwe,s political crisis. The MDC leaders told Mbeki that the next best thing would be to convince President Mugabe to resume negotiations on constitutional changes that would level the playing field. Mbeki promised to raise the issue with Mugabe when the two meet in New York at the UNGA. End Summary.

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MDC,s Mbeki Briefing  
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[12](#). (C) Mudzingwa said the MDC,s Vice President, Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General traveled to Pretoria September 18-19 to meet with South African President Mbeki at the latter,s request (N.B. Party leader Tsvangirai is prohibited from traveling as a result of his on-going treason trial.) Mudzingwa said Mbeki had requested a briefing from the MDC on the political situation in Zimbabwe. These requests from Mbeki for briefings had lately become quite regular, practically monthly. The MDC assumed that President Mugabe and the GOZ were aware of the visits but had yet to make any attempt to interfere with them.

[13](#). (C) The MDC leaders told Mbeki that President Mugabe was making cosmetic changes designed to entice the MDC into the parliamentary elections but without making the fundamental changes needed to allow for a free and fair election. They argued that the key to fundamental reforms was to keep the pressure on Mugabe, both internally and externally. Mudzingwa added that the MDC continued to hope for public statements from the U.S. and others that under the current rules, the elections could not be free and fair.

[14](#). (C) Mudzingwa said the party leaders were especially critical with Mbeki of the ruling ZANU-PF party,s decision to suspend negotiations over constitutional reform in July. The government had withdrawn the reform bill and replaced it the Electoral Commission Bill currently being discussed in Parliament. The MDC leaders told Mbeki that the two parties were at loggerheads over the Electoral Commission Bill, with ZANU-PF proposing that Parliament nominate seven names from which Mugabe would choose four members of the electoral commission and that the President would have the sole voice in choosing the fifth member, the Chairman. The MDC,s counter-proposal had been that each party choose two members and that the Chairman be nominated by the President and approved by Parliament or vice-versa. In any event the key was to establish a check on executive authority. In addition, the MDC team voiced its opposition to a provision in the bill that MPs had to be at least 35 years old, which would hamstring the youthful MDC leaders.

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Mbeki/Mugabe in NY  
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[15](#). (C) Mbeki asked what, short of pressuring Mugabe, he could do to help. The MDC leaders responded that Mbeki should focus on convincing Mugabe to drop the electoral bill and resume negotiations on constitutional reform, including eliminating the 30 positions (out of 150) appointed by the President, and establishing an upper house based on proportional voting. Mbeki had said he would meet with Mugabe in New York at the UNGA and would raise this issue. Mudzingwa said he expected Mbeki to ask the MDC leaders to visit Pretoria again and be briefed on the results of the meeting in two-three weeks.

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Comment  
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16. (C) The MDC continues to believe pressure on the Mugabe regime, especially external pressure from South Africa and the West, is the key to a breakthrough that will allow free and fair elections. Time is running out for that breakthrough to occur. Fundamental change will have to happen by the end of the year to give time for the MDC to campaign effectively. While heartened that Mbeki is meeting regularly with the MDC, we see no sign that he or any other regional leader is prepared to act soon, if at all, in pressuring Mugabe to take the necessary steps. Moreover, constitutional reform was an odd choice for the MDC. The electoral reform bill is the centerpiece of Mugabe's SADC charm offensive and he is unlikely to abandon it nor is Mbeki likely to press him to do so.  
Dell